Shall We Join The Ladies?

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By J. M. Barrie

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SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

STORY OF THE PLAY

(8 Males; 8 Females)

An absorbing mystery, with just a pinch of incisive English wit to give it the proper savor. The action involves thirteen well-to-do people attending a dinner party. The frivolous and gay air is shattered rather suddenly when the host announces that all of them were at Monte Carlo several years ago on the night when his brother was murdered. Then the host proceeds to implicate one after another of his guests, making them stumble into pits he has carefully laid in his speech. He is cool, patient, and witty as the frightful tension increases and his guests drop their masks.

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

Presented at the opening of the Theatre of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, on May 27th, 1921, with the following cast of characters:

SAM SMITH ..... *Mr. Dion Boucicault.*
LADY JANE RAYE ..... *Miss Fay Compton.*
MR. PREEN ..... *Mr. Charles H. Hawtrey.*
LADY WRATHIE ..... *Miss Sybil Thorndike.*
SIR JOSEPH WRATHIE ..... *Mr. Cyril Maude.*
MRS. PREEN ..... *Lady Tree.*
CAPTAIN JENNINGS ..... *Mr. Leon Quartermaine.*
MRS. CASTRO ..... *Miss Lillah McCarthy.*
MR. VAILE ..... *Mr. Nelson Keys.*
MRS. BLAND ..... *Miss Madge Titheradge.*
MR. GOURLAY ..... *Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson.*
MISS ISIT ..... *Miss Irene Vanbrugh.*
MISS VAILE ..... *Miss Marie Lohr.*
A POLICEMAN ..... *Mr. Norman Forbes.*
LUCY (MAID) ..... *Miss Hilda Trevelyan.*
DOLPHIN ..... *Mr. Gerald du Maurier.*

The Scene is the dining-room of Sam Smith's country house in the late evening.

Shall We Join The Ladies?

The SCENE *is the dining-room of* SAM SMITH'S *country house. The time is late evening.*

It is a spacious, dark-panelled room, the furniture is very fine and solid, the lighting discreet. In the C., *a large mahogany table. The silver and glass are very beautiful.*

When the CURTAIN *rises, dessert is being served by* DOLPHIN, *a silent and incredibly efficient butler on the* R., *with the assistance of a* MAID *who is down* L.

Seated around the table are SAM SMITH *and his twelve guests in the positions indicated in the diagram. They are:*

LADY JANE. *Young and very beautiful.*

SIR JOSEPH WRATHIE. *An elderly and arrogant financier.*

MRS. PREEN. *Middle-aged and somewhat neurotic.*

MR. VAILE. *About forty, and a perfect little gentleman, if socks and spats can do it.*

MR. GOURLAY. *An artist, but not a very attractive one.*

MRS. CASTRO. *A mysterious widow from Buenos Ayres. In the late thirties.*

MISS ISIT. *Younger than the widow, but her name obviously needs to be queried.*

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. *A typical young officer, probably in the Guards.*

MRS. BLAND. *In her thirties. We hear nothing of a Mr. Bland. She is inclined to be gushing, especially to her host.*

MISS VAILE. VAILE'S *sister, so she says. But there is something wrong here.*

MR. PREEN. *Of middleage, self-indulgent, but well liked by the rest.*

LADY WRATHIE. SIR JOSEPH'S *wife. She probably has ambitions of her own to match those of her husband.*

SAM SMITH *is a little old bachelor, who beams on his guests like an elderly cupid. That is how his guests regard him, but they are to be undeceived.*

The windows, heavily curtained, are in the R. *wall. There is a door down* L. *and double doors back stage to the* L. *of* C. *There is a massive sideboard against the* L. *wall, and a serving table up* R. *On each are the wines, glasses, and other details ready for appropriate moments.*

(See Ground Plan.)

As the CURTAIN *rises, there is hilarious laughter over some quip we are just too late to catch. But we notice that* LADY JANE *is not laughing, for she is scanning the table and counting the company. As the laughter subsides:*

LADY JANE *(appalled; rising).* We are thirteen at table!

GOURLAY. What's that?

(Many fingers begin to count.)

LADY JANE. We are thirteen. *(She looks down at* SMITH.)

LADY WRATHIE. Fourteen.
CAPTAIN JENNINGS. Twelve. } *(almost together).*
PREEN. Surely not!

LADY JANE *(to* SMITH). We are thirteen.

SMITH. Oh dear, how careless of me. Is there anything I can do?

SIR JOSEPH *(as at a board meeting)*. Leave this to me. All keep your seats. *(He rises.)*

MRS. PREEN. I am afraid Lady Jane has risen.

(LADY JANE *sits.)*

LADY WRATHIE. Joseph, you have risen yourself.

(SIR JOSEPH *sits.)*

MRS. CASTRO *(with an air of mystery)*. Were we thirteen all those other nights?

MRS. PREEN *(reassuring herself and the company)*. We always had a guest or two from outside, you remember.

MISS ISIT *(brightly)*. All we have got to do is to make our number fourteen.

VAILE *(leaning forward)*. But how, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT. Why, Dolphin, of course!

MRS. PREEN. It's too clever of you, Miss Isit. *(To her host.)* Mr. Smith, Dolphin may sit down with us, mayn't he?

LADY JANE. Please, dear Mr. Smith; just for a moment. That breaks the spell.

SIR JOSEPH *(with a look at* DOLPHIN *who is behind and just below him)*. We won't eat you, Dolphin. *(But he has crunched some similar ones.)*

SMITH. Let me explain to him. *(To* DOLPHIN *who turns to* SMITH *respectfully.)* You see, Dolphin, there is a superstition that if thirteen people sit down at table, something staggering will happen to one of them before the night is out. *(To the* OTHERS.) That is it. isn't it?

MRS. BLAND *(darkly)*. Namely, death.

SMITH *(brightly)*. Yes, namely, death.

LADY JANE. But not before the night is out, you dear; before the year is out.

SMITH. I thought it was before the night was out.

GOURLAY *(making to shift his chair)*. Sit here, Dolphin.

(DOLPHIN *makes a reluctant movement.)*

MISS VAILE. No, I want him.

MISS ISIT. It was my idea, and I insist on having him.

MRS. CASTRO *(moving her chair towards* GOURLAY). Yes, here between us.

(DOLPHIN *moves down. The* MAID *smoothly slides a chair between* MRS. CASTRO *and* MISS ISIT. DOLPHIN *sits, so that he is now facing* SMITH. *The* MAID *retires to* L.)

MRS. PREEN *(with childish abandon).* Saved!

SMITH. As we are saved, and he does not seem happy, may he resume his duties?

(DOLPHIN *rises and is checked by:)*

LADY WRATHIE. Yes, yes; and now we ladies may withdraw.

PREEN. First, a glass of wine with you, Dolphin.

VAILE *(ever seeking to undermine* PREEN'S *popularity).* Is this wise?

PREEN *(ignoring him).* To the health of our friend, Dolphin.

(The company drink DOLPHIN'S *health without rising. He gives a slight stiff bow and goes up* L. *A moment later he is discreetly noting who needs a glass refilled. There is a slight stir among the* LADIES *who would now rise but for a detaining gesture from* SIR JOSEPH, *who stands.)*

SIR JOSEPH. One moment. Another toast. Fellow-guests, to-morrow morning, alas, this party has to break up, and I am sure you will all agree with me that we have had a delightful week. It has not been an eventful week; it has been too happy for that.

CAPTAIN JENNINGS *(rising, with a smile at* LADY

JANE). I rise to protest. When I came here a week ago I had never met Lady Jane. Now, as you know, we are engaged. *(The* MAID *commences an ecstatic sigh which is quelled by a glance from* DOLPHIN.) I certainly call it an eventful week.

LADY JANE *(very prettily)*. Yes, please, Sir Joseph.

SIR JOSEPH. I stand corrected. And now we are in the last evening of it. We are drawing to the end of a perfect day—

PREEN *(who is also an orator)*. In seconding this motion—

VAILE. Pooh!

(His lack of good manners checks PREEN, *and* SIR JOSEPH *continues, addressing* SMITH.)

SIR JOSEPH. Though I have known you intimately but for a short time, I already find it impossible to call you anything but Sam Smith.

MRS. CASTRO *(with a dazzling smile)*. In our hearts, Mr. Smith, that is what we ladies call you also.

(SMITH *gives a little smile and bows in her direction.)*

PREEN. If I might say a word—

VAILE. Tuts.

(PREEN *is speechless.)*

SIR JOSEPH *(ignoring all this, and indicating their host with an expansive gesture)*. Ladies and gentlemen, is he not like a pocket edition of Mr. Pickwick?

GOURLAY. Exactly. That is how I should like to paint him.

MRS. BLAND *(leaning in his direction—very gushing)*. Mr. Smith, you love, we think that if you were married you could not be so nice.

SIR JOSEPH. At any rate, he could not be so simple. *(This amuses everybody at the table.)* For you are a

very simple soul, Sam Smith. Well, we esteem you the more for your simplicity. *(He picks up his glass.)* Friends all, I give you the toast of—Sam Smith.

(The toast is drunk with acclamation. DOLPHIN, *who has been quite impassive throughout the speech, refills* PREEN'S *glass. The* MAID *is busy for a moment at the sideboard, then returns to her place. There are cries of "Sam Smith!" and "Speech!")*

SMITH *(rising; with his Pickwickian smile).* Ladies and gentlemen, you are very kind, and I don't pretend that it isn't pleasant to me to be praised. Tell me, *(a tiny pause),* have you wondered why I invited you here?

MISS ISIT. Because you like us, of course, you muddle-headed old darling.

SMITH *(blandly).* Was that the reason?

SIR JOSEPH *(inclined to be playful).* Take care, Sammy, you are not saying what you mean!

(The GUESTS *all display great interest.)*

SMITH. Am I not? Kindly excuse. I dare say I am as simple as Sir Joseph says. And yet, do you really know me? Does any person ever know another absolutely? Has not the simplest of us a secret drawer inside him with—with a lock to it?

MISS ISIT. If you have, Mr. Smith, be a dear and open it to us.

MRS. CASTRO *(This is to* MISS ISIT). How delicious! He is going to tell us of his first and only love.

SMITH. Ah, Mrs. Castro, I think I had one once—very nice—but I have forgotten her name. The person I loved best was—my brother.

PREEN. I never knew you had a brother.

SMITH. I suppose none of you knew. He died two years ago.

SIR JOSEPH. Sorry, Sam Smith.

MRS. PREEN *(drawing the chocolates nearer her).* We should like to hear about him if it isn't too sad.

SMITH. Would you? *(There is a murmur of assent, and he continues.)* He was many years my junior and as attractive as I am commonplace. *(A murmur of deprecation.)* He died in a foreign land. *(Gravely.)* Natural causes were certified. But—there were suspicious circumstances, and I went out there to probe the matter to the full. *(To* MRS. BLAND.) I did, too.

PREEN. You didn't say where the place was.

(MISS ISIT *drinks.)*

SMITH. It was—Monte Carlo. *(He pauses. As* MISS ISIT'S *glass is lowered it slips from her hand to the floor. No one notes it, apparently, but* SMITH *and* DOLPHIN, *and the* MAID *who instantly remove the pieces.)* Dolphin, another glass for Miss Isit.

(Almost before the request it made, DOLPHIN *is gliding smoothly to* MISS ISIT *with another glass. He fills it without the slighest expression on his face.)*

LADY JANE. Do go on.

(EVERYBODY *is most intent.)*

SMITH. My inquiries were slow, but I became convinced that my brother had been poisoned.

MRS. BLAND. How dreadful. You poor man.

GOURLAY. I hope, Sam Smith, you got on the track of the criminals.

SMITH *(blandly).* Oh, yes. *(A chair creaks.)* Did you speak, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT. Did I? I think not. What did you say about the criminals?

SMITH. Not criminals; there was only one.

PREEN. Man or woman?

SMITH. We are not yet certain. (PREEN *nods understandingly, and empties his glass.)* What we do know is that my brother was visited in his rooms that night by someone who must have been the murderer. It was someone who spoke English and who certainly dressed as a man, but it may have been a woman. There is proof that it was someone who had been to the tables that night. I got in touch with every "possible," though I had to follow some of them to distant parts.

(DOLPHIN *quietly refills* PREEN'S *glass.)*

LADY WRATHIE. It is extraordinarily interesting.

SMITH *(replying direct to her).* Outwardly, many of them seemed to be quite respectable people.

SIR JOSEPH. Ah, one can't go by that, Sam Smith.

SMITH. I didn't. I made the most exhaustive inquiries into their private lives. *(Smoothly.)* I did it so cunningly that not one of them suspected why I was so anxious to make his or her acquaintance; and then—when I was ready for them, I invited them to my house for a week, and— *(with a gentle, embracing sweep of the hands)* they are all sitting round my table this evening. *(For a moment a horrified silence; then a low murmur of indignation which dies down as he resumes.)* You wanted to know why I had asked you here, and I am afraid that in consequence I have wandered a little from the toast; but I thank you, Sir Joseph, I thank you all, for the too kind way in which you have drunk my health.

(He sits down as modestly as he had risen, but it is noted that the smile has gone from his face and that he is licking his lips. A confused babel breaks out, during which DOLPHIN, *who has displayed no emotion whatever, goes about refilling glasses.)*

PREEN. In the name of every one of us, Mr. Smith, I tell you that this is an outrage.

SMITH. I was afraid you wouldn't like it.

SIR JOSEPH. May I ask, sir, whether all this week you have been surreptitiously ferreting into our private affairs, perhaps even rummaging our trunks?

SMITH *(brightening)*. That was it. You remember how I pressed you all to show your prowess on the tennis courts and the golf links while I stayed at home? That was my time for the trunks. *(He sips his wine.)*

LADY JANE *(braving it out)*. Was there ever such a man? Did you open our letters?

(The COMPANY *is now very still.)*

SMITH *(to* LADY JANE). Every one of them. (DOLPHIN *refills his glass and retires to up* R.) And there were some very queer things in them. *(Speaking to the company generally.)* There was one about a luncheon at the Ritz. "You will know me," the man wrote, "by the gardenia I shall carry in my hand." Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned that. But the lady who got that letter needn't be frightened. She is married, and her husband is here with her, but I won't tell you any more.

MISS ISIT *(resentfully)*. I think he should be compelled to tell.

PREEN. Wrathie, there are only two ladies here with their husbands.

SIR JOSEPH *(meeting the challange)*. Yours and mine, Preen.

LADY WRATHIE *(in a tone brooking no further argument)*. Joseph, I don't need to tell you it wasn't your wife.

MRS. PREEN *(for* LADY WRATHIE'S *benefit)*. It certainly wasn't yours, Willie.

PREEN. Of that I am well assured.

SIR JOSEPH. Take care what you say, Preen. That is very like a reflection on my wife. *(His voice rises in cold anger.)*

GOURLAY *(contemptuous of these anxieties)*. Let that pass. The other is the serious thing—so serious that

it is a nightmare. *(To* SMITH.) Whom do you accuse of doing away with your brother, sir? Out with it.

SMITH *(looking around at his guests).* You are not all turning against me, are you? I assure you I don't accuse any of you—yet. I know that one of you did it, but I am not sure which one. I shall know soon.

VAILE. Soon? How soon?

SMITH. Soon after the men join the ladies to-night. I ought to tell you that I am to try a little experiment to-night, something I have thought out which I have every confidence will make the guilty person fall into my hands, like a—ripe plum. *(His right hand closes slowly, and rather horribly.)*

LADY JANE *(hitting the hand).* Don't do that.

(VAILE *empties his glass. There is a disturbed murmur and restless movement.* DOLPHIN, *during this, comes down and refills* VAILE'S *glass.)*

SIR JOSEPH. We insist, Smith, on hearing what this experiment is to be.

SMITH. That would spoil it. But I can tell you this. My speech had a little pit in it, and all the time I was talking I was watching whether any of you would fall into that pit.

MRS. PREEN *(rising; nervously).* I didn't notice any pit.

(SIR JOSEPH *and* LADY WRATHIE *exchange a contemptuous smile of triumph.)*

SMITH *(courteously).* You weren't meant to, Mrs. Preen.

(MRS. PREEN *sits rather suddenly.* DOLPHIN *moves up to* R.)

PREEN. May I ask, without pressing the personal note, did anyone fall into your pit?

SMITH *(with a private smile)*. I think so.

(The MAID *makes a slight movement. She is watching* MRS. PREEN *very anxiously.)*

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. Smith, we must have the name of this person.

LADY WRATHIE. Mrs. Preen has fainted!

(There is instant commotion. MRS. PREEN *is lying back in her chair.* SIR JOSEPH *and* VAILE *are attentive but futile.* PREEN *hurries round to up* R., *and takes a glass of water from* DOLPHIN *who has brought it from the table up stage.* LADY JANE *has risen. But* MRS. PREEN *recovers very quickly.* SIR JOSEPH *puts down the napkin with which he has fanned her.* LADY JANE *sits.)*

MRS. PREEN. Why—what—who—I am all right now. Willie, go back to your seat. Why are you all staring at me so?

MISS ISIT *(insincerely)*. Dear Mrs. Preen, we are so glad you are better. I wonder what upset you? *(She exchanges a smile with* MRS. CASTRO.)

PREEN *(to the company, returning to his place)*. I never knew her faint before. *(He instantly regrets his words.)*

MISS ISIT *(as before)*. I expect it was the heat.

PREEN *(from behind his chair)*. Say it was the heat, Emily.

MRS. PREEN. No, it wasn't the heat, Miss Isit. It was Mr. Smith's talk of a pit.

PREEN *(distressed)*. My dear— *(He sits.)*

MRS. PREEN *(in a curious tone)*. I suddenly remembered how, as that man mentioned that the place of the crime was Monte Carlo, some lady let her wineglass fall. That was why I fainted. *(With assumed vagueness.)* I can't remember who she was.

LADY WRATHIE. It was Miss Isit.

MRS. PREEN *(casually)*. Really?

MISS ISIT. There is a thing called the law of libel. If Lady Wrathie and Mrs. Preen will kindly formulate their charges—

GOURLAY. Oh, come. let us keep our heads.

SMITH. That's what I say.

GOURLAY. What about a motive? Scotland Yard always seeks for that first.

SMITH. I see two possible motives. If a woman did it—well, they tended to run after my brother, and you all know of what a woman scorned is capable.

PREEN *(reminiscently)*. Rather. *(Then he is confused.)*

SMITH. Then again, my brother had a large sum of money with him, which disappeared.

SIR JOSEPH. If you could trace that money it might be a help.

SMITH *(leaning forward keenly)*. All sorts of things are a help. The way you are all pretending to know nothing about the matter is a help. It might be a help if I could find out which of you has a clammy hand that at this moment wants to creep beneath the table. *(Not a hand creeps, but several glance at other's hands.)* I'll tell you something more. (MRS. CASTRO *stiffens. The* MAID *glances at her.)* Murderers' hearts beat differently from other hearts. *(Raising a finger.)* Listen! *(There is complete stillness. He almost whispers.)* Whose was it?

(A cry from MISS VALE. ALL *look at her, and she shows confusion.)*

MISS VAILE. I thought I heard it. It seemed to come from across the table. *(A resentful murmur from those on the* R.) Please don't think because this man made me scream that I did it. I never was on a yacht in my life, at Monte Carlo or anywhere else.

(The murmur assumes a triumphant tone.)

VAILE *(sharply)*. Bella!

MISS VAILE *(still more confused)*. Have I said—anything odd?

GOURLAY *(very pleased)*. A yacht? There has been no talk of a yacht.

(VAILE *suppresses fury.)*

MISS VAILE *(shrinking back)*. Hasn't there?

SMITH *(indulgently)*. Perhaps there should have been. It was on his yacht my brother died.

MRS. CASTRO. You said "in his rooms."

SMITH. Yes, that is what I *said*. I wanted to find out which of you knew better.

LADY JANE. And Miss Vale—

MISS VAILE. I can explain it all if—if—

MISS ISIT *(sneering)*. Yes, give her a little time.

SMITH. Perhaps you would all like to take a few minutes.

MISS VAILE. I admit I was at Monte Carlo—with my brother—when an Englishman died there rather mysteriously on a yacht. When Mr. Smith told us of his brother's death, I concluded that it was probably the same person.

VAILE. I presume that you accept my sister's statement?

MISS ISIT. Ab—so—lute—ly.

SMITH. She is not the only one of you who knew that yacht. You all admit having been at Monte Carlo two years ago, I suppose?

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. One of us wasn't. Lady Jane was never there.

SMITH *(his eyes gleaming)*. What do you say to that, Lady Jane?

(LADY JANE *falters.)*

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. Tell him, Jane.

SMITH. Yes, tell me.

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. You were never there; say so.

LADY JANE *(with a touch of defiance)*. Why shouldn't I have been there?

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. No reason. But when I happened to mention Monte Carlo to you the other day I certainly understood— Jane, I never forget a word *you* say, and you did say you had never been there.

LADY JANE. So you—you, Jack—you accuse me—you —me—

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. I haven't—I haven't!

LADY JANE *(suddenly very cold)*. You have all heard that Captain Jennings and I are engaged. I want you to understand that we are so no longer.

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. Jane!

(LADY JANE *has removed her engagement ring as he speaks. For a moment she holds it, hesitant; but by this time* DOLPHIN *has come smoothly to her right, with a salver on which she deposits the ring. In silence he conveys it up and across* L. *to the* CAPTAIN, *who takes it sullenly. There is an audible gurgle of sympathy from the* MAID. *This is a breach of etiquette, and* DOLPHIN, *with stony disapproval, opens the door down* L. *and the* MAID *makes a shameful exit.* DOLPHIN *then refills* CAPTAIN JENNINGS' *glass.)*

SMITH *(in a kindly tone)*. Take comfort, Captain. If Lady Jane should prove to be the person wanted—mind you, perhaps she isn't—why then, the ring is a matter of small importance, because you would be parted in any case. I mean by the handcuffs. I forgot to say that I have them here. *(He gropes at his feet, and brings to light the handcuffs.* DOLPHIN *is instantly at his* L. *with the salver, on which they are deposited.)* Pass them round, Dolphin. *(To the* GUESTS.) Perhaps some of you have never seen them before.

(DOLPHIN *moves from* SMITH *with the salver going around the table clockwise, displaying the handcuffs*

to each as if proffering some dish. It is coldly rejected by ALL.)

PREEN *(as this is in progress).* A pocket edition of Pickwick we called him; he is more like a pocket edition of the devil.

SMITH *(in mild and smiling reproof).* Please, a little courtesy. After all, I am your host. (DOLPHIN *has reached* MISS VAILE.) Do take a look at them, Miss Vaile; they are an adjustable pair in case they should be needed for small wrists. (MISS VAILE *is furious.* MRS. BLAND *smiles at the handcuffs.* DOLPHIN *passes on to* CAPTAIN JENNINGS *who ignores them.* MISS ISIT *gives them a brief look.)* Would you like to try them on, Mrs. Castro? They close with a click—a click.

(MRS. CASTRO *sits rigid.)*

SIR JOSEPH. We quite understand.

(DOLPHIN *shows the handcuffs to* GOURLAY *who smiles at them sardonically.* VAILE *will not look at them.* DOLPHIN *passes on.)*

MRS. BLAND *(rising).* How stupid of us. We have all forgotten that he said the murderer may have been a woman in man's clothes, and I have just remembered that when we played the charade on Wednesday he wanted the ladies to dress up as men. Was it to see whether one of us looked as if she could have passed for a man that night at Monte Carlo?

SMITH. You've got it, Mrs. Bland.

SIR JOSEPH. Well, none of you did dress up, at any rate.

MRS. BLAND *(distressed).* Oh, Sir Joseph. Some of us did dress up, in private, and we all agreed that—of course, there's nothing in it, but we all agreed that the only figure which might have deceived a careless eye was Lady Wrathie's.

PREEN. I say!

LADY WRATHIE. Joseph, do you sit there and permit this?

(DOLPHIN *replenishes her glass.)*

SMITH. Now, now! There is nothing to be touchy about. Have I not been considerate?

SIR JOSEPH. Smith, I hold you to be an impudent scoundrel.

SMITH *(mildly)*. May not I, who lost a brother in circumstances so painful, appeal for a little kindly consideration from those of you who are innocent—shady characters though you be?

PREEN. I must say that rather touches me. Some of us might have reasons for being reluctant to have our past at Monte inquired into, without being the person you are asking for.

SMITH *(glass in hand and sitting back)*. Precisely. I am presuming that to be the position of eleven of you.

LADY WRATHIE *(rising; imperiously)*. Joseph, I must ask you to come upstairs with me to pack our things.

MISS ISIT. For my part, after poor Mr. Smith's appeal I think it would be rather heartless not to stay and see the thing out. Especially, Mr. Smith, if you would give us just an inkling of what your—little experiment—in the drawing-room—is to be?

SMITH *(gravely, twirling the glass in his fingers)*. I can't say anything about it except that it isn't to take place in the drawing-room. *(He sets down the glass.)* You ladies are to go this evening to Dolphin's room, where we shall join you presently.

(For the first time, DOLPHIN *displays a reaction. In moving, at that moment, to the service table up* R., *he halts, looking at his master's back. He then completes his first intention.)*

MRS. PREEN. Why should we go there?

SMITH *(gently; leaning towards her)*. Because I tell you to, Mrs. Preen.

LADY WRATHIE. I go to no such room. I leave this house at once.

MRS. PREEN *(rising)*. I also.

LADY JANE *(rising also)*. All of us. I want to go home.

(The MEN *rise, stepping back from the chairs.)*

LADY WRATHIE *(moving from the table)*. Joseph, come.

MRS. PREEN. Willie, I am ready. I wish you a long good-bye, Mr. Smith.

(The rest of the LADIES, *having risen, move up to the door up* L. *with dignity.* DOLPHIN *has reached the door in time to open it. The* LADIES *stop, and some move back a pace or two, for a* POLICEMAN *is standing just beyond the threshold. The* LADIES *all turn and glare at* SMITH.)

SMITH *(without looking at them)*. The ladies will now adjourn—to Dolphin's room.

LADY WRATHIE. I say no.

MRS. CASTRO. Let us. (SMITH *stands, as she advances to him.)* Why shouldn't the innocent ones help him? *(She gives him her hand with a disarming smile.)*

SMITH *(pressing her fingers, retaining them)*. I knew you would be on my side, Mrs. Castro. *(Confidentially.)* Cold hand—warm heart. That's the saying, isn't it?

(MRS. CASTRO *shrinks back, withdrawing her hand.)*

LADY WRATHIE. Those who wish to leave this man's house, follow me.

SMITH *(after a glance in her direction, raising his voice)*. My brother's cigarette case was of faded green leather, and a hole had been burned in the back of it.

(For some reason this takes the fight out of LADY WRATHIE. *She tosses her head and departs for* DOLPHIN'S *room. The other* LADIES *follow: first* MRS. PREEN, LADY JANE, MRS. CASTRO, *then* MISS VAILE. *As* MISS VAILE *passes* SMITH *he whispers a word or two to her. She is rigid for a moment and then hurries out, followed by* MRS. BLAND.)

VAILE *(as these are leaving)*. What did you say to my sister?

SMITH. I only said to her that she isn't your sister. (VAILE *clenches his hands at his sides. Checking* MISS ISIT, *the last to leave.)* So you never met my brother, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT *(coolly)*. Not that I know of, Mr. Smith.

SMITH. I have a photograph of him that I should like to show you.

MISS ISIT. I don't care to see it.

SMITH. You are going to see it. *(He whips a small photograph from his pocket and puts it before her eyes.)*

MISS ISIT *(surprised)*. That is not—

(She checks herself. SMITH *smiles dangerously.)*

SMITH. No, that is not my brother. That is someone you have never seen. But how did you know it wasn't my brother? (MISS ISIT *is silent.)* I rather think you knew Dick, Miss Isit.

MISS ISIT *(having recovered, drops a curtsy)*. I rather think I did, Mr. Sam. What then?

(She goes out impudently. DOLPHIN *closes the door. The* MEN *stare uncertainly at* SMITH. *who with a secret smile turns away from the door. He takes up a decanter and a box of cigarettes and toddles down to the chair exactly opposite his original place. He is now with his back to the audience.)*

SMITH. Draw up closer, won't you? *(He sits. They*

ALL *drift, very reluctantly, to the chairs nearest him on either side. The sole exception is* VAILE *who is studying a picture near the door. One fancies he would go out if* SMITH *were not looking.)* You are not leaving us, Vaile?

VAILE *(startled)*. I thought—

SMITH *(sharply)*. Sit down.

VAILE. Oh, quite.

(He sits on the L., *on the chair previously occupied by* MISS VAILE. *On his* L. *are* PREEN *and then* JENNINGS. MRS. BLAND'S *chair is empty.* GOURLAY *is in his original seat, and* SIR JOSEPH *in that occupied by* MRS. PREEN. VAILE'S *original chair is left empty.)*

SMITH. You are not drinking anything, Gourlay. Captain, the port is with you.

(The wine revolves, but no one partakes.)

PREEN *(heavily)*. Smith, there are a few words that I think it my duty to say. This is a very unusual situation.

SMITH. Yes. You'll have a cigarette, Preen?

(The cigarettes are passed round but are not accepted.)

GOURLAY. I wonder why Mrs. Bland—she is the only one of them there seems nothing against.

VAILE. A bit fishy, that.

PREEN *(murmuring)*. It was rather odd, my wife fainting.

CAPTAIN JENNINGS *(gloomily)*. I dare say the ladies are saying the same sort of thing about us. *(He lights one of his own cigarettes.)*

(DOLPHIN *is offering them liquers.)*

PREEN *(sulkily)*. No, thanks. *(But he takes one.)*

Smith, I am sure I speak for all of us when I say we would esteem it a favour if you ask Dolphin to withdraw.

(JENNINGS *refuses a liquer with a shake of the head.)*

SMITH *(acceping a liquer).* He has his duties.

(DOLPHIN *passes below* SMITH *to* GOURLAY.)

GOURLAY *(pettishly).* No thanks. (DOLPHIN *moves on to* SIR JOSEPH.) He gets on my nerves. Can nothing disturb this man?

CAPTAIN JENNINGS. Evidently nothing.

SIR JOSEPH *(having waved* DOLPHIN *irritably away).* Everything seems to point to its being a woman—wouldn't you say, Smith?

SMITH. I wouldn't say anything, Sir Joseph. Dolphin thinks it was a man.

SIR JOSEPH. One of us here?

(SMITH *nods. The* MEN *all regard* DOLPHIN *with great distaste. He, as impassive as ever, is now at the sideboard, his back to the company.)*

GOURLAY. Did he know your brother?

(ALL *listen intently.)*

SMITH. He was my brother's servant out there.

VAILE *(rising instantly).* What? He wasn't the fellow who—?

SMITH *(leaning forward).* Who what, Vaile?

PREEN. I say! *(He gives a significant grin to* GOURLAY *and* SIR JOSEPH.)

VAILE *(hotly).* What do you say?

PREEN *(doggedly).* Nothing. *(He looks up at him amused.)* But—I say—

(VAILE *looks venomously at* DOLPHIN'S *back.* PREEN *turns and looks in the same direction. The other two men are also watching* DOLPHIN *who is busy setting liquers back, and arranging glasses.)*

GOURLAY. Are we to understand that you have had Dolphin spying on us here?

SMITH. That was the idea. And he helped me by taking your fingerprints.

(DOLPHIN *crosses back to up* R.)

VAILE *(throwing himself back in his chair).* How can that help?

SMITH. He sent them to Scotland Yard.

SIR JOSEPH *(vindictively).* Oh, he did, did he? *(His napkin falls unheeded.)*

PREEN. What shows finger-marks best?

SMITH. Glass, I believe.

PREEN *(putting down his glass).* Now I see why the Americans went dry.

(DOLPHIN *moves down the* R. *side of the table, attentive.)*

SIR JOSEPH. Smith, how can you be sure that Dolphin wasn't the man himself?

(SMITH *makes no answer or sign.* DOLPHIN *imperturbably picks up* SIR JOSEPH'S *napkin and returns it to him.)*

PREEN. Somehow I still cling to the hope that it was a woman.

VAILE *(trying to keep the anxiety from his voice).* If it is a woman, Smith, what will you do?

SMITH *(in a cold dry voice).* She shall hang by the neck until she is dead. *(Almost genially.)* You won't try the Benedictine, Vaile?

VAILE *(in a hoarse whisper)*. No, thanks.

(The MAID *enters from up* L., *with the coffee tray, which she presents under* DOLPHIN'S *superintendence. Most of the* MEN *accept. The cups are already full.)*

SIR JOSEPH *(in his lighter manner)*. Did you notice what the ladies are doing in Dolphin's room, Lucy?

(The MAID, *at* SIR JOSEPH'S *elbow, gives a scared glance at* SMITH.)

MAID *(trembling)*. Yes, Sir Joseph, they are wondering, Sir Joseph, which of you it was that did it. *(She passes on to* GOURLAY.)

PREEN. How like women!

GOURLAY *(accepting coffee)*. By the way. Smith, do you know how the poison was administered?

(The MAID *passes on to* SMITH.)

SMITH *(about to take a cup)*. Yes, in coffee.

MAID. You are to take the *yellow* cup, sir.

SMITH *(pausing)*. Who said so?

MAID. The lady who poured out this evening, sir.

PREEN. Aha, who was she?

MAID. Lady Jane Raye, sir.

(SMITH *takes the yellow cup. As the* MAID *passes on to above* JENNINGS.)

PREEN. I don't like it.

(SMITH *is about to raise his cup.)*

GOURLAY. Smith, don't drink that coffee!

(SMITH *withdraws his hand.)*

JENNINGS *(in wrath)*. Why shouldn't he drink it?

(A gesture of dismissal to the MAID *who goes to above* VAILE.)

GOURLAY. Well, if it was she—a desperate woman—it was given in coffee the other time, remember. But stop, she wouldn't be likely to do it in the same way a second time.

VAILE *(takes the coffee)*. I'm not so sure. Perhaps she doesn't suspect that Smith knows how it was given the first time. We didn't know till the ladies had left the room.

PREEN *(admiring him at last)*. I say, Vaile, that's good.

(The MAID *replaces the tray on the buffet and stands ready for further instructions.* DOLPHIN *stands above the table, silent and impassive.)*

JENNINGS *(during the above)*. I have no doubt she merely meant that she had sugared it to his taste.

VAILE *(smiling and leaning forward)*. Sugar!

PREEN. Sugar!

GOURLAY. Couldn't we analyse it?

JENNINGS *(pushing his chair back; angrily)*. Smith, I insist on your drinking that coffee.

(SMITH *gives no sign or movement.)*

VAILE. Lady Jane! Who would have thought it?

PREEN. Lady Jane! Who would have thought it?

JENNINGS *(reaching for the cup)*. Give me the yellow cup. *(He drains it.)*

(The MAID *presses her hand to her mouth.)*

SIR JOSEPH *(after a tense moment)*. Nobly done, in any case. *(He leans forward to* JENNINGS.) Look here,

Jennings—you are among friends—it hadn't an odd taste, had it?

JENNINGS *(harshly)*. Not a bit.

VAILE. He wouldn't feel the effects yet.

PREEN *(with confidence in* VAILE). He wouldn't feel them yet.

(The MAID *sways slightly and recovers.)*

SMITH. Vaile ought to know.

PREEN *(as before)*. Vaile knows.

SIR JOSEPH. Why ought Vaile to know, Smith?

SMITH. He used to practice as a doctor.

(VAILE *reacts.)*

SIR JOSEPH. You never mentioned that to me, Vaile.

VAILE *(defiantly)*. Why should I?

SMITH. Why should he? He is not allowed to practise now.

(VAILE *shows his teeth viciously.)*

PREEN. A doctor—poison—ease of access—

(His confidence in VAILE *destroyed, he casts him an unpleasant glance, rises, and wanders despondently to above the table.)*

SIR JOSEPH. We are where we were again.

(The MAID *shows signs of collapse.* DOLPHIN *is instantly at her side and escorts her from the room by doors up* L.C.)

JENNINGS. At any rate, that fellow has gone.

(GOURLAY *gives a short laugh.* ALL *look at him.)*

GOURLAY. Excuse me. I suddenly remembered that Wrathie had called this the end of a perfect day.

SMITH. It isn't ended yet.

*(*PREEN, *now at the top end of the buffet, pours himself some brandy, swirling it thoughtfully.)*

PREEN *(as if to himself)*. I feel I am not my old bright self. *(He sips.)* I can't believe for a moment it was my wife. *(He sips.)* And yet— *(he sips)* —that fainting, you know. *(He sips.)* I should go away for a bit until it blew over. *(He sips.)* I don't think I should ever marry again. *(He finishes the brandy cheerfully.)*

GOURLAY. There is something shocking about sitting here, suspecting each other in this way. Let us go to that room and have it out.

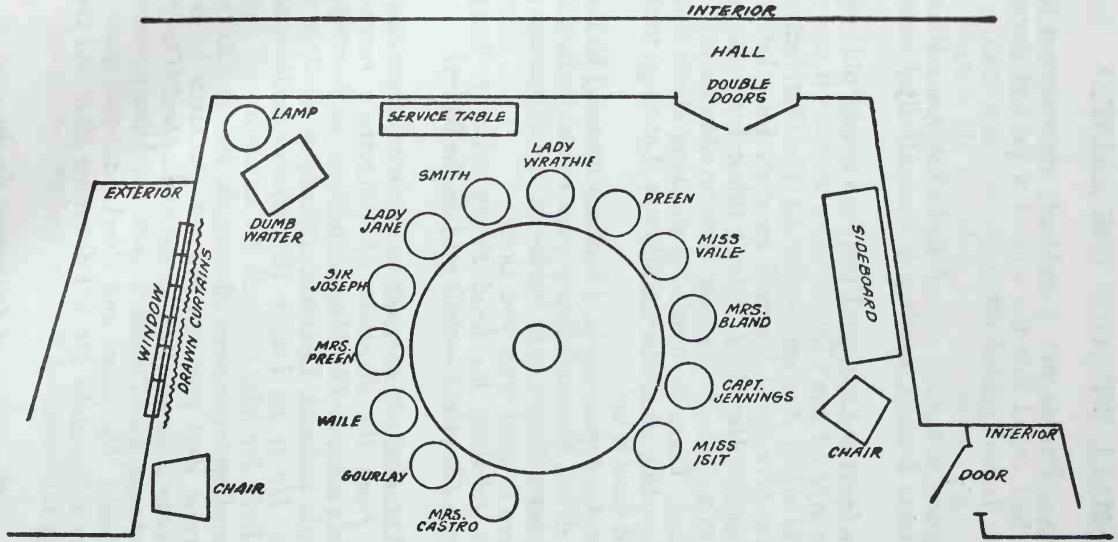
SMITH. I am quite ready. *(Looking around.)* Nothing more to drink, anyone? Bring your cigarette, Captain.

SIR JOSEPH *(hoarsely)*. Smith—Sam—before we go, can I have a word with you alone?

SMITH *(shaking his head slowly)*. Sorry, Joseph. And now— *(he rises)* —shall we join the ladies?

(They ALL *rise. As they do so, a dreadful scream is heard from the direction of* DOLPHIN'S *room—a woman's scream. The* MEN *stand tense and horrified. The next moment,* DOLPHIN *appears in the doorway up* L.C. *He is no longer the imperturbable butler. He is livid. He tries to speak but no words will come. He stands transfixed as the guests, led by* CAPTAIN JENNINGS, *dash past him and out.* DOLPHIN *looks at his master with mingled horror and appeal. There is no response, and* DOLPHIN *goes out blindly.* SMITH *sits slowly. He pours and drinks a small glass of brandy deliberately. He sets down the glass and commences to rise as—)*

The CURTAIN *falls very slowly.*



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